

First records of Nimba Flycatcher *Melaenornis annamarulae* for Ghana

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Premières mentions du Gobemouche du Libéria *Melaenornis annamarulae* pour le Ghana. Le chant du Gobemouche du Libéria *Melaenornis annamarulae* a été entendu et partiellement enregistré dans la Forêt classée d'Atewa, Ghana, le 18 juin 2006, sans que le chanteur ne puisse être vu. La présence de l'espèce a ensuite pu être confirmée par une observation visuelle de deux individus, le 27 mai 2007. Le Gobemouche du Libéria, considéré comme Vulnérable, n'était connu que de la Guinée, la Sierra Leone, le Libéria et la Côte d'Ivoire. Les observations rapportées ici étendent son aire de distribution d'environ 500 km vers l'est.

Nimba Flycatcher *Melaenornis annamarulae* is a rare to scarce and local endemic of the Upper Guinea rainforest block, where it is known from south-east Sierra Leone, south-east Guinea, Liberia and western Côte d'Ivoire (Borrow & Demey 2001, BirdLife International 2004). As the region's lowland forest is disappearing at an alarming rate, this species' population is presumed to be declining rapidly. It is therefore classified as Vulnerable (BirdLife International 2004).

On 18 June 2006, at 13.00 hrs, during an ornithological survey of Atewa Range Forest Reserve—one of only two main forest reserves in Ghana holding remnants of upland evergreen rainforest (Hall & Swaine 1976)—RD heard a song, emanating from the canopy beside the main track ascending the plateau (06°13'52"N 00°33'17"W; c.620 m), which he identified as being from Nimba Flycatcher, a species he was familiar with from Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea and Liberia. A few final phrases were tape-recorded before it started to rain and the bird stopped singing. In an attempt to confirm the identification by hearing the bird again and seeing it, RD visited the location on the three following days, with long periods of time spent at or near the spot, but the bird was not encountered again. The tape-recorded part of the song was compared to published (Chappuis 2000) and RD's unpublished recordings of the species and was found to be very similar.

Informed of its presumed presence, AH subsequently searched for the species during a few day trips to Atewa and finally confirmed the original identification on 27 May 2007, when he obtained excellent views of two individuals foraging along horizontal branches in the canopy atop the ridge

and uttering a chattering call. The birds were entirely charcoal-grey with a rather broad head and a square-tipped tail. Perched, they had the upright stance typical of flycatchers. When AH played a recording of the song (from Chappuis 2000), they reacted by singing back. Their vocalisations were very similar to the first and second parts of the song on Chappuis (2000).

On 12 August 2007, visiting birder David Shackelford obtained brief views in the same area (D. Shackelford *in litt.* 2007), and on 26 August AH had prolonged views of a pair singing from exposed branches in the canopy and was able to tape-record the song. AH had observed birds that he suspected were this species in September 2005 and on 20 August 2006. F. Dowsett-Lemaire (pers. comm.) once heard a few song phrases of a flycatcher she could not identify in February 2005, and which she thought were probably from this species, when she was informed of RD's encounter and had listened to recordings.

This find constitutes a new species for Ghana. Atewa is also the easternmost known site for Nimba Flycatcher, extending its range by c.500 km from the previous easternmost locality, Mopri Forest Reserve (05°50'N 04°55'W), in Côte d'Ivoire (Gartshore *et al.* 1995). Atewa Range Forest Reserve, which covers c.23,200 ha, is an Important Bird Area (IBA) and harbours 14 species of conservation concern (Ntiama-Baidu *et al.* 2001, Dowsett-Lemaire & Dowsett 2005, BirdLife International 2007). It comprises a steep-sided, mostly level plateau at 700–800 m. The forest canopy here is of variable height and presents many gaps, with larger trees reaching up to 40–50 m and emerging above a closed subcanopy of 10–25 m. The forest has been logged in the past

and numerous transects are being cut for mineral exploration. Mining of bauxite is being considered.

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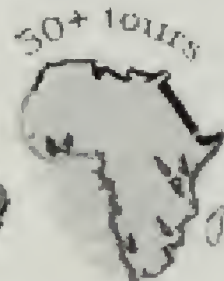
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